

VOL. 31  
NO. 3  
SPRING, 1982  
ONE DOLLAR

# Four Quarters



*Richardson - age 10*

*Rebecca Richards*





# Four Quarters

PUBLISHED QUARTERLY BY THE FACULTY OF LA SALLE COLLEGE  
PHILA., PA. 19141

**VOL. 31, No. 3**

**Spring, 1982**

|                                                                  |           |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Thirtieth Spring, poem by Diane Stevenson</b>                 | <b>2</b>  |
| <b>Suns, Story by H.E. Francis</b>                               | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>Pig, poem by Dabrina Taylor</b>                               | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>Headache, poem by Kate Jennings</b>                           | <b>8</b>  |
| <b>In the Wood, poem by J.B. Goodenough</b>                      | <b>9</b>  |
| <b>Two Poems by Gary Finke</b>                                   |           |
| The Reactionary Ache                                             | 10        |
| Weekend                                                          | 10        |
| <b>A Singular Judicial Procedure, story by Robert Wexelblatt</b> | <b>11</b> |
| <b>Nebraska Moons, poem by Nancy G. Westerfield</b>              | <b>23</b> |
| <b>The People One Sees in a Museum, poem by John Norton</b>      | <b>24</b> |
| <b>Gentlemen at Play, story by Florri McMillan</b>               | <b>25</b> |
| <b>Caught in the Storm, poem by Larry Rubin</b>                  | <b>31</b> |
| <b>Two Poems by Larry Sklute</b>                                 |           |
| Facts                                                            | 32        |
| To —                                                             | 32        |

**Cover: Consuelo Eames Hanks, *Beachcomber*. Print.**

---

*Four Quarters* (ISSN-0015-9107) is published quarterly in Autumn, Winter, Spring, Summer by the faculty of La Salle College, 20th & Olney Aves., Phila., Pa. 19141. Subscriptions: \$4.00 annually, \$7.00 for two years. © 1982 by La Salle College. Unsolicited manuscripts must be accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelope. Available in Microform from Xerox University Microfilms, 300 North Zeeb Rd., Ann Arbor, Mich. 48106. Indexed in American Humanities Index and Index of American Periodical Verse. Second class postage paid at Philadelphia, Pa.

# Thirtieth Spring

DIANE STEVENSON

All winter my body's been hiding.  
Only mornings do I see my feet,  
floating like twin fish in the tub,  
belly-up, loved by no one.  
Peeled from their dry socks,  
these legs are white as a bare  
bum in summer fields at night.  
And all, all is soft as failed bread,  
soft as a heart in its thirtieth spring.

First warm storm I'll bury these clothes  
like old winter seeds in nobody's field.  
then I'll flap through the streets  
like a great flightless bird,  
earthbound and grounded and singing  
spring songs, startling small boys.

# Suns

H. E. FRANCIS

MORNINGS STARTLED HER, simply because they kept coming. She woke before the cock had time to crow morning or the hens to peck and root around in the cave. It took a moment before she realized most of the dirt piled over her sheet had been tossed off in the night, though Matthew's was fairly intact. The earth had her shape now, though she covered it to keep it free of chicken droppings. On the last day she had insisted they dig the beds and lie down without taking the pills because, no matter the pain, she wanted what was natural and he let her have her way as long as they would die together. But when she awoke, a miracle in itself, after they had no conception how long, there was stillness—and morning and the chickens, the few supplies she had at breakneck pace collected and moved from the house, and Matthew's living hand in a half reach toward her bed.

The first few nights after, and sometimes days, she had drawn him down before interring themselves for the night, had coaxed and teased and excited his old flesh, to make him work rather feverishly over her, poor Matthew, with the insanity, she knew, of believing a miracle might come from their old bodies simply because such an unheard of procreation was the only chance of a future, knowing too that it would have to be a girl—and that there was the absurdity of having to live years to bring up a mate old enough to copulate with Matthew if he were still alive.

The absurdity did not prevent her wildest imaginings. Whether Matthew even suspected her design meant nothing. They seldom spoke, for words fostered a past when each thought now only of a future which was actually no future. And they had found words were only valuable to link with what no longer needed linking to or with idle curiosity, which, she now realized, was the major interest the world had really held for them all: even the meaner desires had had their own beauty in the fascination, the intricacies of human nature, which they evoked.

The mouth of the cave grew with the light. The chickens paced along the wire—her last-last minute thought *Grab the roll of chicken wire!*—across the width of the cave. Matthew had fought with the wire, uncoiling it and rolling stones against it, blaspheming—and at that final hour—until he had mastered it. When they emerged from their makeshift grave-

site, he had had to improvise an exit, though they dared not move very far from the mouth of the cave.

It faced northeast, toward all the ocean, and morning sun struck the left edge of the mouth, the facade and curve of the low cliff above. She dared not venture farther than the immediate flat, or ledge, which was high enough so that sea would only threaten but not enter. Up the cliff, down the back slope, she dared not go: in her mind all the ground was covered with an amorphous creature, shifting its mist—greenish, she saw—which might surround and swallow and dissolve everything. She did not know. She would not. It was bad enough that the sea, the air over the sea, had not been clear for the—so it seemed—lifetime they had been here. She did not know how many suns. She had started too late marking them with a stick on the cave wall.

But it was May, she remembered—if she remembered anything—or so the ground told: because she had set out what she had snatched from the greenhouse, seeds of all kinds and, if not the day she had awakened, a morning soon after, she had gone right to them and planted them all, rowed, with her fingers plunged into holes in the dark surface soil on the left, where sun lay of a morning.

Green was coming, yellow bits that made her blood leap, her fingers want to caress, her lips kiss and her tongue lap at them, urging. She wanted to cry out with their growing. And she called him, but in a whisper, whisper, God knew why: *Come look, see, they're green, they're growing.* No Biblical miracle could match the power.

He shook off his dirt bed, came, like Lazarus, to the edge. From the chicken wire he stared. No miracle but blank hunger filled him, and she feared for the green tendrils that were beginning to grope.

She sat, to begin the straining of salt water she let settle every day, though the papers and rags were nearly gone. The little sweet water they had had to be squeezed through rags from the damp mud from one side of the cave, far back, from a trickle, the remains of a spring no doubt cut off or redirected, to judge from the dark soil here and out on the ledge. The corn she had let soak for days they munched and sucked, and that and the chicken feed they ate a bit of, carefully doled out, each time they spread the bit for the rooster and two hens. Now she dreaded the near-empty bottom of the sack, only half full when Matthew had carried it here.

**T**HERE WAS A CRY OF HEN, and she saw life leap into Matthew's eyes as they caught sight of the stretching hen, the pure white of egg in the mishmash the hens nested in. It was the first egg, though the other hen was sitting still, as if with promise. But when she held her hand out with feed as usual, the second hen hardly rose to it. Its stillness frightened. The sight, and a thought, made her breasts tight, her heart

still an instant; and a throbbing passed through her and ended in her hand, throbbing. She touched the hen, which lowered its head against her hand, weak, and rested it there. She held the head, rode her other hand down its back, and a curious little shudder passed through the hen. She raised it tenderly then—there was no egg under it—and pressed it to her breast, feeling the warmth like a cry go through her blood, and settled its head against her neck and stroked it with her chin. She had an impulse to cry, and the cave, sea, and morning light rose in a wash over her eyes and fell clear again.

In clarity Matthew returned: morning bright in his eyes and she mirrored there, huddled with the hen. His gaze did not shift, and she feared his hand. *No*. But only her heart had said it. Her free hand went out and touched his so that he glanced up, and as easily as she could she eased between him and the other hen's egg and told him he had better feel this hen: wasn't she failing? She had never before had to think so fast about things; and it startled that she saw him so apart, like another, like the other, not now the Matthew who was part, half, the other of herself. She for an instant felt strong, stronger, with the knowledge, though she would not be deceived by that false strength, which could only bleed the diminishing strength she felt each day, a diminishing confirmed by the bones Matthew had dwindled to: all wet and longing after his life. For it was she who served, he who waited for the life she was keeping in him.

When his hands clutched the hen, she closed her eyes, feeling the hands on herself, fearing the strength he might suddenly discover. But there was no shriek, the hen lay too still there, and he stared fascinated as if he had forgotten in the staring why he held what he held; so, gently, she raised the hen, though his fingers grew taut and she had to brace her own within them to lift the chicken out safely. *You are right*, she let him know, *we will have to do something before it is too late*, yet a surge of anguish went through her at the hen's helpless eyes, the limp head, fallen beak. She would have said *I'd better do it*, but, determined, his hand scooped, tore the hen by the neck, free of her, with amazing energy—and snapped it before her cry was out. There was an accompanying flurry of rooster and hen, a quick violent squawking, and leaps of light and shadow which halted her blood. Her hands shielded her mouth. But, finally, she was glad. Now, she thought she could not have done it.

With his pocket knife he severed the head and carefully guarded it, drained the blood over his thermos cup, drank more than half and handed it to her. He cut the hen into parts and together they ate, though she warned him: *Slowly, and only a bit now, you won't be able to digest it*. And perhaps because it was the first solid flesh they had eaten, and heavy with fatty skin, after a while they were sick. They vomited. The chickens made a dash to the leavings.

Matthew lay down, and she sat through the day, just inside the cave,

listening to the infinitely fine mutters of hen and rooster, wondering what fine feelings they were transmitting that set up their own motion in her, to the infinite sounds of sea and air and a myriad of moves in the soil, where she hoped there were breaths she could not see that were breeding. She watched the day turn, marveling: she had never felt the motion of the softest vaguely green haze in its turning and blending into multifarious reds and blues and gold into silver and the gray and approaching slate which rose over the sea as a slowly thickening dust and then a soft soft soot even her fingers might touch.

Did she count two or three more suns? There were marks on the wall, but she scarcely remembered the moves of her hands, when she might have done it, how many times she lay in the form of herself in the earth she had prepared, or touched the hand beside her nights, or reached for it mornings, though always with her mind on the hen and the rooster and the egg she could feel now palpitating under her breast with the beat of her own heart, and she smiled.

One morning, nameless as the others or as he and she or anything else now, they finished the chicken, despite the stench, and, as each time, spewed it out. It was the first morning he asked why she no longer went out to watch over her plantings, which, she saw in her head, must surely be standing up straight and tall green, rising to sun: She caught the edge of their golden green glow when the sun flushed over the slope if she stood against the right wall of the mouth of the cave. She saw he was shrewd, urging the press of green in her, softening his voice with a lure as if his young body lay on the ledge, where she could find it again. But she had to resist, for there was the bit of feed he did not know of, some corn, and the fear that his stomach might move into his hands and crawl out and grope and tear at the green that was growing from the ground. So she said she was tired and later on, when the sun had gone down the slope, she would check; or her eyes were tired and getting so weak she was afraid she might step where she should not. Or so she preferred to tell him. Naturally, she went out: but in moments when what was left of her hawk eye, alerted now by fear for the egg, saw—and her fifty years of knowing his breath heard—that it was no feigned sleep he was sleeping. She stole out to feed the pulse of her blood, which surged with a new rhythm at her triumph of seeds.

Time came when he tried to outsit her, she knew. He resisted his place. He claimed weight hurt him, sitting made easier breathing, and moving too much weakened. But she laughed with her old laugh of years gone, an energy which she saw startled him. And her energy must have made him yearn too, for his hands twitched, they flexed, his eyes fixed on the hen where it was brooding, the vaguest form in the vagueness of dusk: and she knew with his mind that the night would hold only his desire, intense enough to keep him strong and awake and make her vigilant

because of the one new variation she had never known in his breathing. So to urge him to good rest, to firm habit, to comaraderie and a bit of the fermented corn to foster most strength until morning, she promised him the egg, heard surprise and shock and pleasure simultaneously released in his caught breath yet still somewhat too carefully emitted to conceal his impatience. But perhaps to give her illusions he appeased her and went to lie in his place beside hers.

She kissed him as usual, though she felt him far from her heart. She poured the corn, gave up at last his tablet, and stirred it among the kernels. He drank.

In the silence that followed she removed tops of tins, set seeds and feed under covers and rags so the hen and the rooster would have to keep rooting to find, tore the fence loose at one end to give them free access, and went back to lie in her own place. For an instant she almost could not bear the life she contained: all her blood seemed to break from her flesh in green shoots, fill her eyes her mouth, growing; green pulsed from the earth of her grave through all her limbs; and she could feel, as she drank her portion and pill, the hot motion in the egg under the hen growing with the pulse of her womb.

## Pig

stands against green and brown  
hay, scattered corncobs, a rusted scythe.

The moon's crescent hangs low  
from the clouds. Wind traces through slopes

of neighboring hills, then drops.  
Something rustles the fragrant grasses,

robins weight the tips of forsythia branches.  
Pig quivers, nestling her swollen belly

in straw. When night opens, six blind births  
steam in the bright cold. A mauve ribbon

glistens and curls behind them; their wet warmth  
rises through a pale sheen of afterbirth.

DABRINA TAYLOR

# Headache

KATE JENNINGS

A cloudy day, and the layer of clouds  
traps noise, and wraps me in it: each  
and every sound's assault: the thump

and screech of the earth-moving machines  
from the construction site across the street  
fight the constant thunder from the airport

and here at home the baby's crying  
and the washing machine's rumbling  
and pounding through the rinse cycle

while downstairs someone hammers  
a steady rap and rap, not quite  
loud, and upstairs the pianist

begins to practice his scales,  
each note a battery, each key  
the last straw, and the noon

whistle blows, the church bells  
chime twelve times, the spider  
plant quivers with vibrations.

Hand to forehead: my skull's too thin  
to case this chaos. My brain hurts.  
Each cell feels filled, crammed with

memories, sense, lists and notes, dreams,  
fears, plans, and I wish I could rake it,  
scrape it clear and clean of the stratum

that lies like coquinas, jewels jammed  
densely, shell to shell, grating, grit  
just beneath the sand's smooth surface.

The baby quiets tantalizingly in her crib  
for nearly five minutes and I almost  
take a deep breath

when she begins to  
wail again and I stiffen, tense  
with the need for stillness, and in

desperation slam doors and close  
windows, hoping for peace.  
Yearning for silence.

## In The Wood

J. B. GOODENOUGH

O the naughty children  
That died one after  
The other, just simple  
Pox or catarrh or bloat,

Children do not love  
Mothers when they die  
Like that. I wanted to  
Beat them, burying them,

The saucy white child-  
Flesh gone to visit  
Beetle-aunties, worm uncles,  
Leaving me behind.

But you, you are merry.  
You lay a bone in my hand,  
You tell me it is your wrist.  
O I will feed you well.

# Two Poems

GARY FINKE

## THE REACTIONARY ACHE

It discovers it can go home again,  
Speaks to my neck of flags, standing armies,  
The preservation of the past. It would  
Be at ease in black tie, the formal ache  
Observing protocol. Only I am  
In pain, am afraid it is here to stay.  
More frequently chilled, older, I begin  
To favor the resumption of the draft,  
Dress codes, the return to law and order.  
At school I am going back to basics.  
It approves, reminding me when I wake  
That it is faithful. Massage, heat, a change  
Of climate are my secret dreams. Punish  
My neck again; I cannot surrender  
The names of those things I still believe in.

## WEEKEND

This morning the scenery is bruised,  
Discoloring October as if pain  
Were in season, and you are driving  
To see me, a shadow cast on the road,  
Pushing buttons across the radio  
To find a long distance song.

My luminous clock repeatedly flashes,  
Stupidly insists the time is wrong.  
The sun is in slivers; the road  
I remember runs on like switches  
Sewn to close a spectacular wound.

# A Singular Judicial Procedure

ROBERT WEXELBLATT

## FIRST VIGIL

IT WAS NOTHING LIKE THE HORRID PLACE in which he had been kept during the trial. The walls were panelled, and there was actually a rug covering part of the concrete floor—an old but not overly worn Oriental rug with an intriguing design in four different colors, and fringe at either end. The cot, though just a regular iron prison cot, supported an especially thick mattress, a new one the prisoner judged by its firmness. There was also a desk, small but quite nice too, almost an antique. It was made of oak, not stamped out of metal, with two drawers and a matching chair. More remarkable still was the green leather library chair which the prisoner tried at once and found to be comfortable, particularly when he used the wooden desk chair as a hassock. A television set with a sixteen-inch screen was fixed directly to the wall not far from the ceiling, reminding the prisoner of the sets in hospital rooms; but, he realized, as this arrangement increased his floor space it revealed that some thought had been given to it. The room—or cell, for after all, it *was* a cell—measured twenty-by-fifteen according to an estimate the prisoner made later. Instead of a crude overhead fixture there were two lamps: a small one for the desk and another, a modern chromium floor-lamp, positioned near the toilet. The prisoner pulled it next to the library chair and noted that the desk lamp could easily be moved to the little pinewood night-table should he desire to read in bed; the cord was just long enough. The room had no bars, only a quite ordinary door. Except that this door was locked from the outside and there was no window, the cell would have made a passable room in a hotel of the sort favored by prosperous travelling salesmen.

Having arrived rather late in the afternoon, a little nauseous from the blind ride in the airless wagon and thoroughly drained from the suspense of the jury's deliberations—a suspense which reached so exquisite a level in the final moment that he had very nearly shouted when the greasy foreman opened his mouth—the prisoner merely collapsed on his cot for the hour before, to his amazement, dinner was served to him. Whereas at the other

place he had gone to a messhall with the other prisoners and all the guards had worn peaked caps and blue uniforms with as many brass buttons as they could manage to sew on them, here his meal was brought to him by a huge, solid fellow in a plain grey uniform and no hat at all. Moreover, as the prisoner discovered at once, the food here was almost good. Despite his nausea of the afternoon he found he had a fine appetite.

The guard behaved peculiarly. He came in after knocking twice, handed over the tray, and stood by the door the whole time as if he were blocking the way. And, though he would not converse, neither was he mute.

"What's this place called?" the prisoner had asked while taking the tray over to the desk, half a roll already crammed in his mouth.

"It is possible to have wine, if you request it," said the guard with a sort of bored solemnity, as if he were reading from something. He barely looked at the prisoner, though he did not look at anything else either.

"Wine?"

"One glass with supper. As provided for by statute, any book or magazine you request will be furnished to you. Stationery and pens are in the desk. Letters may be mailed through me."

The prisoner listened for any tone he could fix—especially disapproval, repulsion, some measure of the public outrage over him—but he found none. The guard spoke a little like a judge, it was true, but a very weary judge, not an angry one.

"Why's this place so damned nice? Huh?"

"Visitors, should there be any, may be received here."

"What's your name?"

But though the prisoner persisted throughout his meal, asking about where he was and who was in charge of him, the guard would say no more. There was, therefore, nothing to do but to look at him more closely. The guard was balding and rocked back and forth a little on his heels, keeping his hands behind him for balance. It may have been an involuntary movement. His shoes appeared to be new, and they squeaked as he rocked. He had a paunch and a cold-sore too; nevertheless, for all these signs of human imperfection, the man stood there with as much meaningless composure as an automaton would have.

The guard withdrew just as soon as the prisoner, leaning back in his desk chair, indicated that he was finished eating. During the moment that the door was open, the prisoner was able to satisfy himself that, as he had been too exhausted and dizzy to ascertain during the afternoon, there was nothing to be seen outside but a plain white corridor.

Now that he had time to think, the first topic his mind fixed on was naturally his appeal. It was of an appeal that his lawyer had spoken just before the prisoner was led away; and, though he had the distressing sense that the lawyer might only have mentioned it to fill the abyss opened under his feet by the words of the foreman and judge, still the lawyer *had* spoken

of it. Besides, though he was no jail-house lawyer, the prisoner was not without certain ideas; there were avenues which might be explored, arguments which could have some, albeit marginal, force. All that was necessary was to develop these a little; the lawyer would certainly know what to do with them. Perhaps, he thought in retrospect, he had not given enough assistance to his lawyer in the first place, had been too willing to leave everything to him, had not sufficiently the attitude of a team effort.

Still at the desk, he opened one of the drawers. As promised, he found within it a stack of plain unlined paper and a packet of envelopes wrapped in cellophane. In the second drawer he discovered two ballpoint pens. The idea that having a desk with two drawers was so obviously an extravagance actually made him smile, as if it were a reassurance.

He set himself to write with great difficulty and soon found that he was getting up every few minutes and pacing about the room; it was on one of these occasions that he carried out his measurement of the cell. At last he was oppressed by the irony that he should be thus escaping from his appeal into his cell, and with a smirk of derision aimed at his own laziness, he forced himself to stay put at the desk until he should have worked out something like a first argument. It was while he paused to read over this composition that there was a knock at the door. It startled him. Then it came again—two knocks. The prisoner assumed it must be the balding giant in the grey suit, but no one entered. Instead the knocking was repeated.

“Do you think I can open it, you idiot!” he shouted, as if he were really being distracted from some important undertaking.

“May I come in?” a rather timid and muffled voice said through the thick door.

“Only if you’ve got a key,” said the prisoner resentfully and turned toward the door.

A key rattled awkwardly in the lock for several seconds. Finally the door opened slowly and a young man—so young he looked barely out of his teens—sidled in. The prisoner was as surprised by his dress as by his age. He wore a tweed sports jacket over a light blue sweater and a tattersall shirt open at the neck, a pair of new jeans, and sneakers. In his left hand, almost concealed from the prisoner, he carried a black bag of the sort doctors once used for housecalls, though somewhat larger. The prisoner assumed the young man must be a doctor—just, or just about, out of medical school—come to give him a physical examination.

“Good God, they sure turn ’em out young these days,” he said with contempt. “Do I really have to be looked at again? Believe me, they didn’t miss a hole at the other place.”

The young man looked as if he would curl up with embarrassment. Glancing down at his bag, he nodded to show he understood the prisoner’s error. “I’m not a doctor,” he mumbled, then turned pale. “Oh, I wasn’t

supposed . . .” Then he stopped short and just stared, horrified, at the prisoner.

“What’s the matter?”

The young man made an obvious effort to pull himself together. He put the bag down on the cot, stood up straight, cleared his throat and said, “Are you ready?”

“Ready? Ready for what?”

The young man looked troubled and as if willing to explain, but instead he just pointed to the bag. “Are you . . . *ready?*” he repeated.

“What the hell for?” asked the prisoner with annoyance.

The young man tremblingly opened the bag and took something wrapped up in cotton. This he unrolled over the blanket.

“What in hell is that?” asked the prisoner, starting to rise from his chair.

The young man held it up. The edge caught the light from the desk. The double-edged blade must have been over a foot long.

“Are you ready?” The young man had broken out in a sweat. “Are you ready?” he repeated.

## SECOND VIGIL

*They claim they aren't holding back my mail.  
Aren't my letters reaching you? Have you  
moved? Are you sick? You looked faint when  
they took me—*

THE PRISONER LAID DOWN HIS PEN and shoved himself away from the desk. He felt a little ill, a little unsteady. He looked up at the television. A crowd of firm young people was drinking cola on a beach. He had turned down the sound. They all hugged and smiled. One woman held a beach ball. The prisoner crumpled up the paper and reached for a fresh sheet. He picked up the pen and wrote with headlong speed.

*The best times were when we were both drunk.  
Drunk and on the floor. Drunk and in the car.  
No more pretending. We built a house of cards  
on a rickety table. People do that. That's all  
people ever do. I love you. You love me. We love  
each other. I lie. You lie. We lie. There are a  
hundred things about you I can't stand—*

Once more he paused. He began actually to count the things about her that he couldn't stand. He could only think of fourteen. Fourteen was enough; fourteen was plenty.

*Enough looking forwards, enough looking  
backwards. Maybe it's cowardly to say it now,  
in a letter you won't—*

Two knocks. "May I come in?" The prisoner said nothing. He only raised his pen for a moment, then went on, pressing the point into the paper as if he wished to tattoo it and not merely to write.

*—even read. I don't care. Enough of the  
comedy. It's a relief to me that you didn't come  
here . . .*

Two more knocks. "Go away!" shouted the prisoner, but he pulled open a drawer and stuffed the letter inside.

The young man came in with his bag as timidly as he had for the last two weeks. "Are you ready?" he asked, not mechanically, but with real curiosity.

"No, I'm *not*," said the prisoner. "Get lost."

The young man ducked out quickly. The prisoner threw the pen at the door.

### THIRD VIGIL

**I**N THE PRISONER'S DREAM his father held him by the neck with one hand while, with the other, he was trying to open the cellar door. He was afraid of the dark cellar and he knew his father would throw him in there as soon as he got the door open; but his father was so drunk and so furious that he couldn't get the key to work. It rattled in the lock as his father squeezed his neck.

"You awake?"

"Hunh?"

"Wake up," pleaded the young man in a loud whisper.

The prisoner sat up.

"May I turn on the light?"

"Umm?"

"I only have a minute," the young man said as he switched on the desk lamp, carefully shading it away from the cot. "First off, are you ready, by any chance?"

The prisoner yawned.

"All right," said the young man, who seemed unusually agitated, even for him. "Look, this is bothering me. I can't even sleep. It's not my fault. The job's hereditary, probably the only one left in the world. My father died suddenly—an embolism—they had to take me out of school . . . You understand?"

What are you talking about?"

The young man made such an earnest face that he looked even more like a student. "You don't see?"

"Go away," said the prisoner and turned over.

The young man only whispered more loudly. "Look, they used to be public events. There were processions through the streets. People took their kids, got drunk, cheered. Okay? Then they moved it all behind walls, but there were still witnesses at least, and usually the press. So—"

"So what?" mumbled the prisoner.

The young man almost whined. "So this is logical, don't you see? A logical extension of history."

"Screw off. You want me to kiss your hand because you think history's logical? You're worse than the goon!"

"It's not me," the young man insisted, intent on his speech. "People were against it. They pressured the government. They formed societies and published tracts. Their arguments were good ones. I've read them with tears in my eyes, believe me. The arguments were so good that they convinced the legislature the whole thing was hypocritical if not downright barbarous. Unfortunately—that is, unfortunately for me and you—the legislature wasn't convinced actually to do away with it entirely, only that it might be hypocritical and barbarous. So they passed a set of regulations that set all this up. Of course it's not very well known, even in legal circles. That's how people are. They don't want to stop not knowing. Still—"

"Not knowing what?"

"About this ritual, I guess."

"Ritual?" The prisoner rolled over and looked. "Jesus," he said.

The young man snapped to mock attention next to the cot and recited: "The Executioner will come to the Condemned at least once every twenty-four hours. He will behave politely and humanely, asking permission on each such occasion to enter the cell. He shall speak only the words 'Are you ready'? That's how it reads, more or less, I'm new at it, of course. My father was in the prime of life. An embolism, a bit of nothing. I was studying Anthroplogy. I haven't been properly trained or anything."

"Talk about hypocritical," the prisoner said with disgust.

"Rather."

"But—a goddamn knife?"

"It's very sharp. I tried it on a piece of carbon paper."

"Screw you!"

"Then you're really not ready?"

The prisoner pushed himself up on one elbow. "I'd like to use it on *you*, that knife!"

At this the young man leapt back a step, shut off the light, and began to back toward the door.

"Hold it a moment," cried the prisoner.

"Yes?"

"Do your regulations provide for a visit like this?"

The young man looked troubled. He put his finger to his lips. "Not so loud," he begged. "I don't want them to—"

"Oh, so you're breaking regulations, aren't you?"

The young man thought a moment. "I don't know. It's possible, even likely."

"And what if I turned you in?"

"Oh, I don't suppose that would matter much."

"Why not? Wouldn't you get sacked?"

"Probably not. I'm an only child."

"Me too," said the prisoner softly.

"You're absolutely certain, then?"

"Huh?"

"That you're not ready yet?"

"Yes! That is, no! Bastard!"

"I quite understand," said the young man and slipped out the door.

#### FOURTH VIGIL

**H**IS LAWYER HAD RESIGNED long ago. The guard who brought the food and books had grown entirely bald and still fatter, though no more loquacious. As his body softened, his face hardened; his job made him at once mushy and brutal. He seemed to have no other life. When the television tube burnt out, the prisoner did not bother to ask that it be repaired. His request for outdoor exercise had been denied but those for exercising equipment (long rubber belts with which he could pull against himself) and a good fountain pen had been promptly approved. The several hundred books he had asked for had likewise been delivered within a day or two of each request, though grudgingly, by the guard. The young man had officiously made out a reading list for the prisoner; and whenever he ordered one of the books from this list, the guard was particularly resentful.

He was reading a volume of Scott's *Waverley Novels*, which he had complete in an ancient leather-bound edition, when the usual knock came.

"May I come in?"

He didn't bother answering or looking up.

The young man was wearing a three-piece suit and beaming. "Are you ready?" he asked with even more than his usual eagerness.

"What're *you* so happy about?"

"Oh, I'm glad you asked! I've got great news."

"Really? Great?" mocked the prisoner, taking off his glasses.

"Two pieces of news, actually."

"Well?"

"Well, first off, I've found a job. I had the interview just this afternoon." He indicated his clothes. "They offered it to me on the spot!"

"You already have a job, remember?"

"Well yes, but it doesn't take much time, does it?"

"No, not much . . . So, what's your new career?"

"Teaching! What I've always wanted to do. I'm to be called 'Visiting Assistant Professor of Anthropology.' I'll have two classes next term."

The prisoner shrugged. "So what's the other news?"

"Even better! I'm going to be married."

"Married?"

"Well, with the two salaries, I can swing it very nicely now. Interview this afternoon, proposal this evening. This is the happiest day of my life!"

"Congratulations," said the prisoner without much conviction.

"I suppose we'll have kids," said the young man more to himself than to the prisoner. His mind was on the future.

"Not necessarily," said the prisoner.

"Well, we both want to. We talked about it once."

The prisoner ignored him.

"Ready?"

The prisoner put his glasses back on and opened his book.

"Not ready, then?"

The prisoner threw down the romance with exasperation; it thumped on a copy of Prescott's *Conquest of Mexico*. "Look," he said, "hasn't it once occurred to you that it would be impossible? Impossible! Oh sure, it's one thing to do it out on some scaffold with the sun shining down and cheering crowds all around. But not *here*, not all alone, just you and me. What would you do? Put me down on that cot and stab me to death? cut my throat? Even that big dumb bald bastard wouldn't be capable of it, let alone you!"

The young man tried to cover his embarrassment by quickly wishing the prisoner good night and, nearly forgetting his bag in his haste, left the room.

## FIFTH VIGIL

**H**E HAD MADE A BARGAIN with himself that his poem should rhyme and at the same time tell the truth. So far he found he had to surrender either one or the other, and so he gave up particles of truth. But when he had gotten it right, he felt, his poem would become part of the great world. Everyone would come to know it; children would read it in schools someday. Though it was his first poem, it never occurred to him that there would be any need of a second. He had the initial line all right:

*The room is long; my life is short.*

It had come to him while he was doing situps, and it had made him want to

write other lines, lines which would trail after it, explain it, justify it, add to its majestic piteousness and significance. But every new word was less satisfactory, every further verse a compromise with perfection.

Now the first line lay on the white page with a truthfulness so blunt and black that it nearly moved him to tears. He was on his seventh draft. Everything had changed six times except that stunning first line. He began to write slowly, as if for the first time or the last.

*The room is long; my life is short.  
Stressed panels of the cheapest sort  
Hide thick wall; the mattress is ripped;  
Things have the air of being whipped.  
There's not much heat, no view at all,  
Just shoes that scrape out in the hall.  
Dim lamps set six feet apart  
Light up my lair. As to my heart,  
Discouragement weaves through its rug;  
Despair fills up its plastic mug.  
Memory mixes up the noise  
Of giggling girls and laughing boys.  
One day a thousand years ago  
It was ordained this should be so.*

He read it over twice. It might just do, he thought, but the ending was no good. It needed a clincher, something memorable, not merely abrupt—an end worthy of the beginning.

The two knocks. "May I come in?"

"You're going to anyway," the prisoner muttered to himself.

The young man was dressed in a tuxedo. "Are you ready?" he asked.

The prisoner looked around in spite of himself. His hair was wild; he had been rubbing his scalp as he wrote. Hairs and bits of dandruff were all over the desk, all over his poem.

"Well, well," he said. "Look at the monkey in his monkey-suit."

"Are you ready?" the young man reiterated and, for the first time, the prisoner heard him ask it with a note of impatience.

"Oh now, don't tell me I'm holding up the honeymoon?" he smirked.

"How can we go away for a honeymoon if you're not ready?" said the young man sullenly and sat down on the cot.

"That's really too bad," said the prisoner. "What a pity! It's really a dreadful shame. The legislature ought to do something about it."

"Okay," said the young man coldly. He got up to leave.

"No, wait," said the prisoner.

"Well?"

The prisoner hesitated.

"Come on," said the young man, his hand already on the doorknob.

"I wonder—"

"What *is* it?"

"I was just wondering . . ."

The young man sighed with irritation.

"Well, you've been to school. You know about books. You're a professor."

"So what?"

"Would you, well, just look over something? It's something I wrote."

The young man laughed. "You want *my* opinion?"

"Who else is there? That goon?"

The young man put down his black bag. "What is it?" he asked with only a touch less impatience.

"It's a poem," the prisoner confessed.

"I'm very fond of poetry," said the young man a little patronizingly.

The prisoner got up from the desk, scraping the chair's legs on the concrete. "Here," he said, pointing to his last draft. "Tell me frankly what you think."

The young man walked across the Oriental rug, sat down at the desk and glanced for only an instant at the paper. "Are you balding?" he asked. "I hadn't noticed before."

The prisoner leaned down and violently brushed the hairs from the paper. "Just read it," he said through his teeth.

The young man read.

"Well?" asked the prisoner.

"Your mattress isn't ripped, is it? If it's ripped I'll see you get a new one."

"No," said the prisoner with rising irritation. "No, it's not ripped."

"Ah, I see, poetic license. That go for the heat as well?"

"Never mind *that*. What about the rest? You know, the overall effect?"

"Not too bad, really, especially that first line. It's actually very . . . very *strong*."

"Yes?" said the prisoner, who was only a little pleased by this praise. After all, the first line had been given to him, so to speak; it was the rest he had worked for.

"But the ending's weak. You need something more, I'd say."

"I know," said the prisoner excitedly, "but I haven't been able to come up with anything yet. I'm still working on it."

The young man looked the poem over again. He picked up the prisoner's fountain pen. "May I?" he asked.

Startled by this liberty, the prisoner found himself nodding.

The young man scribbled something at the bottom of the page and leapt to his feet, taking up his bag. "Just a suggestion, you understand," he said. "Now I really have to go."

By the time the prisoner had grabbed the paper the young man was

halfway out the door. At the foot of the page, separate from the rest of the poem, and in a childishly neat cursive hand, lay one couplet:

*For some unreckonable wrong*

*My room's too short, my life's too long.*

It was perfect, the ending he had been seeking but would never have found. The prisoner's mouth fell open as he turned. The door was already closing. "You bastard!" he yelled. The door thudded shut. The prisoner read the poem all the way through once more, then tore it up and flushed the pieces down the toilet.

## SIXTH VIGIL

**T**O COMPENSATE FOR THE LOSS OF HIS HAIR, the prisoner permitted his beard to grow unchecked and untrimmed. The whiskers came in reddish, curly and, on his chin, thin and scraggly. He seldom read any more and gave up exercising entirely. As a result, his appetite fell off, and it was rare that he felt like finishing the food brought to him silently and faithfully by the guard on whose large nose an intricate system of capillaries had at last become visible. The prisoner slept more and dreamed less.

Some months earlier, the young man had asked him to listen to his notes for a special lecture he had been invited to deliver to a society. Without even thinking of his poem, the prisoner had given his assent—out of boredom—but he had offered one or two suggestions for which the young man appeared genuinely grateful. After that, he began to stay for longer periods of time and to talk of more things. For instance, he confided to the prisoner a few of his worries. Now that his wife was pregnant he would need to buy a house. The prisoner gave him some good advice on plumbing and roofing. Then there was a rival at the university who sought to block the young man's appointment to a regular position on the faculty. So the prisoner had to hear the young man's complaints about the envy and duplicity of his colleague. His wife was terribly ill in the mornings. The doctor had even mentioned the possibility of a miscarriage. The prisoner attended patiently to all this and, despite his indifference, frequently found himself drifting into thoughts about the young man even when he was alone—about his career and his wife. He asked to see a picture, and the very next night the young man brought him a snapshot taken at the seashore. The woman was young and blonde, even younger and blonder than the prisoner had suspected. Her hair was fine; the wind blew it across her forehead. On her face was a smile as open and vacant as the blue sky behind her. He put the picture away in the drawer that used to hold ballpoint pens.

The young man now brought nightly reports on the progress of his wife's pregnancy, boring in their minute details, embarrassing in their

intimacy. Of late, he stayed for shorter periods; he was so anxious to get back to her. "The baby could come at any time" became a refrain the prisoner heard almost as often as "Are you ready?" Indeed, the statement and the question now framed all their conversations.

Early one evening when the young man came the prisoner had already gone to bed. In fact, he had scarcely left it all day. He lay on his cot in an empty, interim state so that he failed to notice that the young man omitted to knock or to ask to enter; he simply unlocked the door and rushed over to the chromium floor-lamp, which he switched on.

The prisoner merely blinked. The young man's shirt was open at the throat; he looked joyful and weary.

"A boy!" he cried, as if certain of the prisoner's response.

"A boy," the prisoner repeated dully.

"Over eight pounds. She's fine, just fine. They're both fine." The young man seemed eager to assure the prisoner of his family's health.

The prisoner did not yet look at the young man. "So, you have an heir," he said.

"And that's not all! No!"

"Oh?"

"The chairman told me my appointment's in the bag. In the bag!"

The young man looked down at his hand. "No pun intended," he chuckled and placed the black bag on the desk. He walked back and forth while he said, "It's a beautiful night out. I wish you could see it. . . . It's spring," he added.

The prisoner rubbed his eyes with one hand.

The young man yanked the desk chair over to the side of the cot and impulsively took the prisoner's hand in his own. "We're going to name him—after you," he said softly, almost with a dying fall.

"Me?"

The young man nodded and let go of the prisoner's hand.

The prisoner fell more deeply into his mattress, which was no longer so firm. "You've forgotten something," he said slowly.

"Forgotten?"

The prisoner held the young man with his blurred, watery eyes.

The young man stood up.

The prisoner inclined his head, raising it a little from the pillow.

"Are you . . . ready?"

"Yes," said the prisoner without a pause. "Ready."

The young man looked distressed but said nothing.

"At last," the prisoner breathed out. "Why not?"

As the young man, shocked, still did nothing, the prisoner sat up, tore off the top of his grey pajamas and, with a single gesture, hurled the shirt across the room. Then he flopped back down, letting his arms dangle over either side of the cot. "Do it. Now," he commanded.

"But—"

"Now!"

"But . . . there's a misunderstanding." The young man scrambled to his feet and rubbed his cheek nervously.

"What?"

"Oh, I've known all along what you thought. It was only natural. But I couldn't tell you. You understand? Regulations strictly forbid—"

"Good God, what? Forbid what?"

"My telling you." Without looking, the young man reached behind him for the black bag he had left on the desk.

"Telling me?" The prisoner seemed confused.

The young man opened the bag and took out the rolled-up knife. "I sharpened it yesterday," he said softly. "I do it three times a week." He carefully unrolled the knife in his hands and wiped down the blade with the cotton swathing. Taking it by the blade he handed the knife to the prisoner. "Here," he whispered.

Hesitating for no more than an instant, the prisoner took the knife and felt its weight. In the light from the floor-lamp the young man's thumbprint was still visible on the metal. "Ah, I see," the prisoner said. "Absolution, is it?"

After bowing from the waist in the precise manner provided for in the regulations, the young man snapped shut the black bag, which echoed hollowly, and, closing the door behind him as quietly as he could, left the cell.

## Nebraska Moons

NANCY G. WESTERFIELD

The urban moons: January's cold  
Penny profile of Lincoln's, coppering  
In sunset over shop and school; or snow  
Deep in Omaha below a wan  
Small boulevard globe of moon.  
There's a barge of moon in April  
Coming up the Missouri, paddle-wheeling  
The wet sky; but May's moon is climbing  
A lacework ladder of clouds like Jacob's.  
June's a cottonwood picnicking moon,  
Pronged like a marshmallow on a fork  
Of stout boughs, and August's a mauve  
Moonberry ripe in a silver vine  
Of stars. Outstate in November, fanged  
And falcate, the wolf at the door is the moon.

# The People One Sees In a Museum

*for Duane Hanson*

JOHN NORTON

Frozen like hunted game  
these bright gawds poise  
in a grey forest.

The balding storekeeper tilts back  
into a padded chair,  
stares at distant ceilings  
and counts (one, two) beats  
from coronary.  
A nodding addict slumps and waits;  
he's still in no rush.

As for those awful tourists  
two weeks of this *must see* tour  
stretch on and on and on;  
heads craned, ceramic eyes upcast,  
they gaze back on the gazing crowds.  
The old woman waiting for Trailways  
sets into eternal daydream  
while polymerical David,  
trowel in hand, will never bare  
his sculptured torso, sing a horny tune  
or feel in the gut that hardening wet.  
Some have bags packed; all hold and wait.

By the door two sharp-eyed guards.  
One stares down a beak at a large black mole,  
shifts, and the other. . . later in the Cafe,  
some large veined man, purple shirt open  
and heaving for breath, leans in to tell  
why real bagels haven't been seen around  
San Francisco since World War II.

*Berkeley, 1978*

# Gentlemen At Play

FLORRI McMILLAN

## THE FOURSOME

The foursome enters the locker room laughing, leaving the bags and caddies behind. The retired Chairman of the Board leads the way. He is followed by the current President and Chief Executive Officer of his company, lean and young, full of the energy that success brings. The President herds along the Japanese Inventor, who has devised a 2¢ plastic valve capable of turning water into wine. Behind them comes the Outside Consultant, of whom they are all afraid.

## THE PANEL

The panel of four enters the round auditorium in ceremonious procession, a gaggle of respectful undergraduates in its wake. Leading the way is the Retired Editor of a major mass circulation magazine. He is followed by a young and confident professor, who is the editor of *Dogfight*, a prestigious literary quarterly, and the mastermind of this colloquium. The Professor escorts the Novelist, whose recent offering has been widely and flatteringly reviewed. At the end of the line is the Critic, of whom they are all afraid.

## THE CLUB

The Four Musketeers climb the stairs to the clubhouse, leaving the Little Kid behind. The first to enter is Leroy the Leader, so called because he is the oldest and it is his garage. He is followed by Sparks, the organizer and the brains behind the Club. Next comes Richie, who not only owns, but also can ride a ten speed bike, shifting the gears without stripping them. Last of all is Sullivan, a member of the West Side Kings, who supplies information and of whom they are all afraid.

## SCRUTINY

The golfers sit down and begin to untie their spiked shoes. They discard their brightly colored polo shirts with the alligator over the breast. The President stands, feet wide apart, admiring his little group. The Consultant pushes his visored cap up off his forehead and observes the occupants of the locker room.

The intellectuals seat themselves behind the long table and shrug the shoulders of their tweed jackets into position. The Professor stands, arms akimbo, and admires his little group. The novelist crosses one leg over the other knee and scratches at the white sock just above his jodphur boot. The Critic pushes his half-glasses down off his nose and surveys the audience.

The boys sit down on the bare wood floor, folding their sneakers under their thighs. They pull down their T-shirts or numbered jerseys. Leroy the Leader remains standing for a moment, hands in pockets, admiring his little group. Richie picks his nose and examines the prize carefully.

## THE AUDIENCE

In the corner, over by the older, rusty lockers sit a group of Junior Members. They have modulated their voices deferentially at the entrance of the Chairman of the Board. They are wondering whether it is safe to signal the barboy now, before the foursome has ordered, or whether they should wait.

In the cantilevered semi-circles of seats surrounding the podium sit several groups of students and teaching fellows. Their animated conversations have faded to a tentative murmuring at the entrance of the Retired Editor. They are wondering whether it is safe to smoke now, or whether they should wait until one of the panelists pulls out his pack.

In a dim corner of the room over the garage stands the Little Kid. He does not say a word. He is waiting for his brother, Leroy, to notice him. He is wondering whether, when the moment comes, he will have the courage to tell Leroy, "Mom says you have to let me play."

## PREPARATION

The locker room barboy has anticipated the late afternoon rush, and he is ready. He now moves quickly from group to group with his pad and small round tray, confident in the knowledge that a dozen glasses, already filled with ice, stand waiting on the bar.

The Moderator has done his homework, and he is ready. He now moves quickly along the table with a pitcher of water, filling the glasses of the panelists, confident in the knowledge that the pad of notes in his breast pocket will elicit every viable topic of discussion.

Leroy the Leader has anticipated some minor difficulties in getting the club meeting underway, and he is ready. He now sits down and quickly removes from under his jersey a bag of chocolate sandwich cookies, which he has stolen from his mother's kitchen. Confident in the members' reaction, he places these in the center of the circle.

## UNANIMITY

Pretty soon the Chairman of the Board holds up his hand and says he is going to tell a joke. The other members of the foursome listen attentively. They all laugh loudly just before the Chairman gets to the punch line because they want to show the old man that they respect him, and because they have all heard the joke before.

At a certain point in the panel's deliberations, the Retired Editor clears his throat and interrupts to make a point. The other panelists turn toward him, listening attentively. They all begin to nod in agreement long before the Retired Editor has finished making his point because they want to show their august colleague that they revere him, and because it is a point they first began to make themselves ten years ago, when it appeared in his magazine.

When the time is right, Leroy the Leader puts up his hand to indicate that he has something to say. The members quiet down, looking at him with curiosity. "Who," asks Leroy, "is going to be the President of this club?" He looks modestly down at the floorboards. Before he can continue Richie says, "You," and the others answer one by one "You," "Yes, you" because they know who owns the garage.

## DISCUSSION

Over the drinks, discussion begins. The Consultant opens by re-enacting his birdie on the long par five Sixteenth. The President counters with an account of his experience on the same hole last Saturday, when it played even longer. The Junior Members have begun to crowd in a little, mildly interested. The Chairman of the Board carries the day by launching into a description of his triumph over the Sixteenth at Cypress Point in California, a hole so beautiful that he has commissioned a painting of it to hang over his fireplace. The Junior Members drift away, returning to the fringes.

At a sign from the Moderator, the discussion begins. The Retired Editor opens with a few general remarks about realism. The Professor counters with a brief summary of the anti-realist position. The discussion centers on literary mimesis, and the students lean forward slightly in their seats; a few pens emerge. The Critic launches into a description of neo-anti-realism, which, the Novelist says, is probably the same thing as the old realism anyway. The students slouch back and look surreptitiously at their watches.

Munching on the cookies, the Club Members discuss the efficacy of Richie's knuckle ball, which no one can catch without breaking a finger. The Little Kid creeps out of the corner, thinking he might learn something. Leroy says it's the spit that does it. That and the dirt, amends Sparks—a little dirt from the mound mixed in. Sullivan comes on strong, saying they're all crazy; Vaseline is the only thing, not spit, a little Vaseline under the visor of your cap. Richie says he'd like to see Sullivan catch his spitball any day, and the Little Kid melts back into the shadows. He is only six and can't play hardball yet anyway.

## STAR WARS

Breaking the ensuing silence, the President says, "Hear about Pearson's big success? He made a deal with MGM for the rights to those *Star Wars* spooks. He's putting them on everything he makes—plastic cups, food packaging, disposable diapers."

"That Pearson," sighs the Inventor, "everything he touches turns to gold."

"He'll probably show up with that tobacco-chewing monkey on his jock strap," says the Consultant.

"Christ!" snorts the President enviously.

"I suppose he got the rights to him too," laughs the Consultant.

"Now on the Seventeenth . . ." the Chairman interrupts.

The Junior Members ask the barboy for another round.

Breaking the ensuing silence, the Novelist says, "The success of realism depends on internal principles. Look at *Star Wars*."

"The movie?" asks the Professor.

"Surely," says the Novelist, "you appreciate the marvelous structuring of the different levels of perception. Now is that structural realism or isn't it?"

"Christ!" snorts the Critic.

"Precisely," answers the Novelist. "Is the monkey Christ, or isn't he?"

"Gentlemen," interrupts the Moderator, "shall we return to the topic at hand?"

The students sigh wistfully.

Breaking the ensuing silence, Sparks says, "*Star Wars* is a great flick."

"Nah, it's a stupid flick," says Sullivan, "a jerk flick for little kids. Darth Vader is a jerk."

"Luke Skywalker's not a jerk," says Richie.

"Luke Skywalker is a fart," Sullivan answers.

"He's a fruit, not a fart," says Sparks. "He dyes his hair."

"Christ," snorts Sullivan disgustedly.

"And there's another pansy hairdo for you." Sparks tells him.

"Hey you guys," interrupts Leroy the Leader, "back to business."

The Little Kid blinks back tears.

## TRADE OFFS

Around five o'clock the foursome begins to break up. Rising languidly, the Consultant puts his hand on the shoulder of the Chairman of the Board. "Say Charlie," he says, "I want you to know how much I appreciate your underwriting the Children's Symphony performance we talked about in April."

"Perfectly all right, George," rumbles the Chairman. "I'll be coming over to your outfit next fall for a contribution to the hospital's Surgical Building Fund. Let's make it lunch."

Around five o'clock the panel begins to break up. The participants rise and stretch together amiably. When he has gathered his notes together, the Professor turns to the Critic.

"Thanks for flying in, Bob," he says. "You're always a great addition to these road shows."

"Don't mention it, Stan," grins the Critic. "I take it you'll be coming to us in the spring for the two-week residency."

Around five o'clock the Club begins to break up. One by one the members push themselves up off the floor, reaching into their back pockets as they do. Sullivan sidles over to Leroy and says, "I'll trade you a Reggie Jackson for your Pete Rose."

"Everybody's got a Reggie Jackson," says Leroy disdainfully.

"Not the new Reggie Jackson, with the red border," presses Sullivan. "Look at this."

"Reggie Jackson is Reggie Jackson," answers Leroy. "He trades two for one."

"So, I'll throw in the Yankees team card," says Sullivan.

"You got a deal," Leroy tells him.

## AVE ATQUE VALE

The Chairman of the Board stands up slowly and tightens the towel wrapped around his ample waist. Sighing happily, he turns away from his foursome, moving toward the showers to soak away the cares of the day.

The panel are all standing now, putting their papers away in their briefcases. Released by the final snapping of small brass locks, they sigh and turn away, their backs to one another.

As the club members file down the stairs, Leroy the Leader unzips his pants. Turning away from his constituents, he sighs happily as he pees in the corner.

## Caught in the Storm

LARRY RUBIN

Hurricanes wind up  
In the counter-clockwise brain  
And I wait for one to absorb me.  
Those spiral bands on the satellite photo  
Reach for the black infinities—  
Wind-wrought talons clutch  
For final space, hurling heaven  
Toward the shrouded coast, where I  
Glide along the beach, achieving  
Weightless glory with each gust,  
Sand coiled in my nostrils, spume-  
Spattered from the squall, wholly  
Driven toward the core of all.

# Two Poems

LARRY SKLUTE

## FACTS

There is no doubt I am awake  
Smoking, against reason, at 5. A.M.  
The tranquilizer didn't take  
My mouth is coated with a bitter phlegm,  
The fillings in my teeth taste tin  
My stomach growls and threatens to be sick,  
The sockets of my eyes are dry,  
They itch from pollen and too much gin.  
The stubble on my face is two days thick.  
Redolent marks of last night's history,  
My fingers smell of pork chops, marigolds  
And sampler perfumes from department stores.  
Folds of my robe fold comfortably  
Among my sagging, tired body folds.  
There is no doubt, these are not metaphors  
And I fell very, very, very old.

## TO —

You touch me with your eyes  
A gentle, stinging touch  
You make me realize  
My manifold disguise—  
From you I want too much.

My flesh respects my soul  
Enfolds my naked sighs;  
Your glance unwraps my role,  
Reveals me, amphibole,  
You touch me with your eyes.



# Contributors

In our thirtieth spring (to use Diane Stevenson's title), we are pleased to have so many FQ alumni represented, as well as some fine new talent. "Suns" is H.E. FRANCIS's thirteenth story to appear in our pages—only *Southwest Review* and *Prairie Schooner* have published more of his work. He has been with us for almost our entire existence. Professor at the University of Alabama, Huntsville, he published his second collection, *Naming Things*, in 1980. FLORRI McMILLAN returns after her striking debut (with "Petites Lecons Francaises") in Summer 1980. Last summer she was a Breadloaf Scholar and found happiness in being on "the panel side of the Panel." ROBERT WEXELBLATT first came to our attention with the quirky and wonderful "Kelman on the Machine" (Spring '79); his poem "The Cartographers" appeared in Summer of 1980. He teaches at Boston University. Appearing as a poet here, KATE JENNINGS has had a story, "Cruising Thirty," in our pages before. She lives in Geneva, Switzerland. In 1974, she won grand prize in the *Writer's Digest* creative writing contest; her first volume, *Second Sight* (Iron Mountain Press) appeared in 1976. Three other poets are also returnees: each has had three poems with us before. J.B. GOODENOUGH reports that her life is quite unchanging—"like pondwater, a sort of small but busy stasis." For all that, she is making current appearances in 24 other journals. LARRY RUBIN still teaches at Georgia Tech, as he awaits publication of his fourth collection, *Journeys Through the Bone* (Godine). He is the Spring 1981 winner of the Bulletin Contest sponsored by the Poetry Society of America. NANCY G. WESTERFIELD was a Fellow at Yaddo in 1979 and 1981. A member of the Executive Council of the Episcopal Diocese of Nebraska, she recently published her first short story, "mea culpa," in *Cats* magazine.

We are very pleased to welcome 5 faces new to us. Writing Center Director and Tennis Coach at Susquehanna University, GARRY FINKE won the 1980 All Nations Poetry Contest (*Passage*) and the Sasso-Parker Memorial Award (*Greyledge Review*). He's published in *Poetry*, *West Branch*, and other journals. A former academic, JOHN NORTON happily described his move to a high-tech position at a recent Berkeley conference on the Humanist as Business Practitioner. His poem is dedicated to the sculptor Duane Hanson. LARRY SKLUTE has recently finished a novel. He lives in Berkeley and teaches at St. Mary's College. DIANE STEVENSON is completing an M.A. in Philosophy and a Ph.D. in English at Ohio University, where she has won several poetry prizes, including the Emerson Prize judged by Donald Hall. Her work will soon appear in *Southern Poetry Review*. A native of Maryland's Eastern Shore, DABRINA TAYLOR studies creative writing with Michael Waters (of fond memory) at Salisbury State College there.

---

Editor: John Christopher Kleis

Poetry Editor: Richard Lautz

Business Manager: Esther Washington

Editorial Assistance: Daniel Burke, FSC; Robert T. Fallon;

Patricia Haberstroh; John J. Keenan.